

KEEPING OUR HEADS ABOVE WATER

Welcome to 2007! Wishing that this New Year will be a safe and ultimately happy one for you and your loved ones.

Question of the month – turning the tables to ask you!

Q. Now that the big rush of holiday activities is over, are you perhaps feeling a little down? Still stressed from all the pressures of trying to meet expectations – but having too little time to nurture you? This is a common post-holiday reaction – but for those who are separated from loved ones it is almost guaranteed. Hey, if you are feeling on top of the world, let us know how you did it! For everyone else – check out the mental health tips from MHN and **circle January 20th on the calendar.**

A. Saturday, January 20, we'll have the second gathering of UT families in the DC area; PLUS a 'live' toll-free conference call and simultaneous web cast of a STRESS MANAGEMENT Workshop. FLO is partnering with the Transition Center to use classrooms at the Foreign Service Institute in Arlington. We'll start with an hour (10 – 11am) of socializing and networking, and then send the younger children to another room for supervised activities while the adults attend a workshop with a professional trainer. The Stress Management workshop (from 11am – noon) will be interactive and 'live' for participants anywhere in the world. We hope you will be able to participate on the 20th whether in person or 'virtually' since you'll have the opportunity to ask questions, hear commentary, etc. Watch for a detailed announcement very soon! **It will be imperative that we have your names in advance** if you think you might attend – also the names of any children or guests. Since it is a Saturday, Security has to have the list in advance and you will have to show a government issued picture ID. Watch for a detailed announcement soon!

New on FLO's Website

Make a New Year's Resolution to visit www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c14521.htm regularly in 2007. Two items in particular will be appearing shortly:

Mini-job Announcement

The Cox Foundation supported a grant to develop and distribute individualized Handbooks for the children who have a parent (or two) serving an Unaccompanied Tour. We will need a technical writer/editor capable of working independently to produce age appropriate modules on topics such as: Area Studies, emotional/somatic reactions, coping tips, etc. If you have an advanced degree in education, childhood development, psychology, social work, etc. and an interest in short term, part time employment, watch for the announcement!

Results of the Survey

No doubt some of you reading this were among the 416 respondents to the electronic survey we conducted in late September, early October. THANK YOU! DOS employees accounted for half – 208 – of all replies while 35 were “USG other” and 7 each were contractors or “other” employees. Among the 159 family members who participated, 151 were spouses (including 8 tandem spouses), 3 were fiancés or Members of Household, and 5 were parents, siblings, or other. The vast majority were reporting based on UT’s and evacuations in the past (for instance, of the 208 DoS employees, only 45 were assigned to an unaccompanied post when they took the survey); a handful were writing in anticipation of going. Throughout the month of January we will be presenting the data and analyses in various venues, including on our website.

The survey was designed to assess the following:

1. Level of satisfaction of those experiencing an Unaccompanied Tour (UT) re: past and present support services;
2. Awareness and utilization of existing support services; and
3. Perceived needs for future support services.

These are the initial conclusions:

1. Employees are, on the whole, more positive than negative about the services and compensations provided to them and their families.
2. There is a clear need to do more education about existing services, to dispel myths, and to reach out to employees and families – especially those outside of the DC area.
3. Several areas for improvement were noted:
 - a. Expand DSAC training to other UT posts;
 - b. Provide more out-briefings;
 - c. Improve HR and payroll functions;
 - d. Provide consolidated checklist with resource links;
 - e. In general, utilize technology to overcome time/space barriers;
 - f. Increase ISMA and provide a transitional SMA;
 - g. Establish CLO at every UT post;
 - h. Expand FLO outreach; and
 - i. Inaugurate an electronic newsletter.

The last five are already underway and efforts are on-going. Since October, this newsletter has gone out monthly (current distribution: over 300 employees, over 230 family members, and approximately 200 CLO offices worldwide). The Program Specialist for Unaccompanied Tours has developed a more efficient method for making the initial outreach to families and FLO’s IT guru is developing a streamlined database system for improved record keeping. FLO has used conference calls with simultaneous web casts to provide interactive Orientation Sessions worldwide; plans are underway for a second “gathering of the UT

families” in DC and another in Houston, TX, for April 1st (seriously – not an April Fool’s joke!). We chair an Allowances Working Group to look at all Allowance questions; and both Kabul and Riyadh have established CLO among their EFM positions. However, there is still a long, long way to go and suggestions are always welcome!